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NAPOLEON JACKSON
THE GENTLEMAN
OF THE
PLUSH ROCKER

BY
RUTH
MCENERY
STUART

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
LIBRARIES

Ethel Moïn

With cordial regards

of her friend

Ruth McEnery Stuart

Oh, Louis my meat, oh, Louis my a

Oh Louis my daily fare;

Asleep, awake, forgit or think

I breathes it in de air.

1919.

NAPOLEON JACKSON

" The family group of Rose Ann, washerwoman."

NAPOLEON JACKSON

THE GENTLEMAN OF THE PLUSH ROCKER

BY

RUTH McENERY STUART

AUTHOR OF "SONNY," "HOLLY AND PINEN," "A GOLDEN WEDDING," "MORIAH'S MOURNING," ETC.

With pictures by
Edward Pottbast

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NAPOLEON JACKSON

NAPOLEON JACKSON

THE GENTLEMAN OF THE PLUSH ROCKER

I

THE picture of the family group of Rose Ann, washerwoman, as gathered almost any day at her cabin door, was a pictorial expression of the great story of her life—its romance, its tragedy, and, fortunately for all concerned, its comedy.

Rose Ann was, as already introduced, and as she herself would have told you, a washerwoman—"not none o' yo' fancy laund'esses, but jes a plain grass-bleachin', sun-dryin', clair-starch-

in', muscle-polishin' washerwoman." Would there were more of her kind!

She was fat, black, maternal; and as she stood among her piccaninnies before her tubs, in character, even to the turning up of her faded skirt from her bare feet, it was gratifying to see that she was alive and happy.

The group of children, a dog or two, and a maternal cat,—also in character,—slept, played, quarreled, or frolicked about her feet, and on the grass-plot beyond her wash-bench. The smaller children were nearly naked, taking the group in midsummer; a baby of less than a year, who disputed a bone with a playful pup, was quite so.

This much of the picture might have been duplicated, excepting as to unimportant details, at any one of a dozen cabin doors within a mile of Rose Ann's. A note of apparent discord

comes in with the father of the family, the gentleman in starched linen, if you please, who, in an attitude of elegant leisure, reclined in the easy-chair at the washer's right—somewhat apart from the group, but near enough to his spouse for comfortable conversation.

This personage—there are some who are always, by grace of a certain innate distinction, "personages" in any group of persons—this personage, then, was, so he was introduced, "Mr. Napoleon Jackson, Esquire," and he was, as seen at a glance, a man of color, of leisure, of family, and of parts. As to color, Napoleon, or 'Poleon familiarly, was so deeply endowed as to be almost colorless, which is to say, he was black. He was as nearly black, that is, as any man or crow was ever known to be. The highest expression of the pure African is by no means a forbidding

type. Far from it. Of course the familiar "types," which alone are really typical, are of other sorts. But Napoleon was an exception. If there had been any room for the suspicion, any slight deflection of color admitting a ray of doubt, one would have said, with small feeling of hazard, that he was part Indian. But that was simply because of his slender and great proportions, the straight lines defining his supple figure, and the high bridge of his nose, to which feature his amiable face chiefly owed its dignity.

It takes more than polished linen, plush easy-chairs, and muscular relaxation to express the real inborn spirit of repose. It is true that the only creases in Napoleon's duck trousers were those which told of easy risings and sittings, and that his cuffs, which were polished until they were as fine as celluloid, gen-

erally went "all unbroke" back to Rose Ann's tubs, but the lordly grace of the man was a thing apart from either raiment or incidental setting. That it was somewhat heightened in effect by the chair of crimson plush in which he lounged cannot be denied. This resplendent article, of which more anon, was of the pattern known as the Morris chair, with an adjustable back. Rose Ann called it by another name, but that belongs further along in the story. As to the "blooming tree," perhaps that, too, can wait. However, it is part of the composite, and belongs in the picture. An old sycamore, dead by a lightning-stroke which had robbed it of all but a single spreading limb on one side, had been transformed by the hand of love—love for the idle man beneath it, not for the tree—into a brilliant canopy of flowering vines, morning- and even-

ing-glories for each day's greetings and farewells, Virginia creeper, honeysuckles, a straggling rose, and others for perennial flower and leaf. In the height of its florescence, as now, and particularly in the slanting hours of the going and coming sun, it was a glory worthy —well, perhaps worthy of a better cause. And yet, no. Is it not sufficient reason for its being that it was in itself a gladdener of mortal sight, a holder of song as well as of color? For there came humming-bird and butterfly, honey-bee and moth of tawny wings. And love lived, too, at home, snugly nested in its tangle of woody honeysuckle, starred over now by red cypress flowers and shaded with waxen leaves of cool Madeira. Surely the canopy was worth while for its own sake, which is to say, for love and beauty's. Who would stop God's rain because it falleth as saith the Scripture?

The back of the Morris chair was lowered by means of a brass rod and a series of notches. About the hour when the morning-glories began to twist up their cups, leaving the blood of the cypress stars to catch the upmoving sun, Rose Ann's habit was to slip the rod back a notch or two behind her lord, for this was his usual napping-time. Not that he always slept. For there were mornings when he seemed to enjoy whatever he saw in the canopy above his head, and occasionally he would call Rose Ann's attention to a tragedy or comedy of life there which might have been a reflection of that enacting below, though neither he nor she would ever have discovered it. He-birds are often mighty fine gentlemen, if you please, and there are plush rockers galore in nature's greenery chambers for such as they when their pleasure may be to tilt upon their

perches while they bask in the adoration of their dutifully sitting mates. What is the difference, a nest or a tub, to typify the conserving partner—the home-maker?

And some of these feathered fellows are, even as was Napoleon, fine, able-bodied types. And many are song-birds, too, as was he.

Rose Ann was a magnetic woman, as most thoroughly vitalized people are—most, but not all. Some there be who thrive as air-plants, ever luxuriant, but detached, self-contained. But our woman was not of this class. Rather was she of those who, rooted to the soil by a thousand live fibers, grow, thrive, blossom, and bloom, not to speak of bearing, for the joy of all such as come in contact with them. It was her part of life—life abundant, warm, sweet to the possessor. It needed that God

should send a woman like this as mate to the man in the chair; that is, if he be mated at all. And surely, if physical perfection and a gentle heart count for aught, it were a pity to have him wasted. Perhaps it would better be said, for the sake of the few space-blind, who know not how to read between the lines, that Napoleon had never in his life been known to do any kind of work—that the situation, which has already been described as interpretative, was not an incident or a phase of his being. It was its very essence.

Such a life was, of course, open to criticism, and, equally of course, it got it. But since Rose Ann had, according to her oft-declared defense, known just what she was doing when she married him, and since it was her pleasure, perhaps even her pride, to labor for her lord's leisure,—in other words, to pit her

tubs against his chair,—and since there was neither lean nor hungry one between the two, and while there was joy in the song by which she washed, as well as impetus to industry in its stirring measure, it would seem that criticism may have been vain and sympathy wasted.

"Well, I married for love, an' I got it," she was wont to exclaim to such of her neighbors as were indiscreet enough to challenge her conjugal loyalty. And she generally added, often flapping a wet garment between her palms for emphasis, "An' *I'm happy in it!*"

Then, if the guest were of an insistent turn, or if Rose Ann happened to be herself in a voluble mood, she would enter more deeply into the subject in this wise:

"Of co'se, when I married 'Poleon, I knowed he was n't to say de 'dustri-

"He co'ted me settin' down fannin'
. . . whilst I flung de hoe."

ousest man in de worl', an' I ain't got no right to complain. He did n't *work* whilst he was *co'tin'* me an' *stop* arter he got *married.* No, sir. He co'ted me settin' down fannin' 'isself or layin' in de clover whilst I flung de hoe. An' I swapped off de hoe for love an' duty arter I got married, 'ca'se a wash-bench is better 'n a potato-hill to raise chillen roun'. No, I know it ain't none o' his fault. He *can't* work, 'ca'se his mammy she *marked* him so. She had been overworked befo' he was born, an' she marked her chile for *rest.*"

II

THUS she bravely exploited the situation to her idle guest, Calline Caxton, one afternoon, and the woman must, either by word or look, have expressed some disapproval of the maternal prevision, for Rose Ann hastened to add:

"Yas, I know a plenty o' de ole folks tol' 'er it was a sin ag'in' de unborn an' contrary to de Scriptures, which say how man dat 's born o' 'oman is boun' to earn 'is bread by de sweat of 'is brow. But she 'lowed dat she had *sweated enough for two,* an' she nuver raised de mark off 'n 'im. No, 't ain't dat 'Poleon don't *want* to work; howsomever, I

don't say he *do*, but *ef* he did, he *could n't*. I done seed it tried. Three or fo' strokes o' de hoe-handle or de rake 'll sicken 'im wuss 'n a dorg. It 's a spell she laid on 'im. Yas, I done seen him sicken wid a workin' tool one minute, an' maybe de nex' minute some o' de gals 'd come foolin' roun', an' he 'd ketch 'em up an' dance roun' my wash-bench wid double a hoe-motion, an' jes git up a' appetite for 'is dinner. It ain't de *labor* dat hurts 'im. It 's de *thoughts* of it."

Perhaps she fancied even further disapproval in her guest's eyes, for she hastily added, and in quite another tone:

"But I sho does like to see 'im settin' so—tekin' it easy. I don't know what I 'd do ef I did n't have him to feast my eyes on whilst I 'm workin' so constant. I tell you, a' able-bodied man in sight is a heap o' consolation."

To this her visitor replied with a sniff that it would "pleg her all but to death ef she had to keep her ole man in her eye all day."

To which Rose Ann cleverly retorted: "I don't wonder!"

Whereupon the offended Calline, coolly remarking that it "took a heap o' kind o' people to mek a world," strolled loftily away.

"So long! Call ag'in, sister," cried the jovial Rose Ann, fairly chuckling while she raised a wet garment for inspection, and in a moment she added to herself:

"I don't blame you, sister. I sho don't. It 'd pleg me, too, to haf to look at a cross-eyed, swiveled-up little some'h'n' other lak Br'er Clay Caxton. It sho would—an' all his brick-layin' dirt on 'im, too."

She even dropped her work for a

moment, and watching the slim red figure down the road, she laughed again.

"Yas, indeedy. Ef I was tied to a little laborin' thing lak Br'er Caxton, I reckon I 'd be put to it, an' haf to tek comfort in Tukky-red Mother-Hubbards, too."

Then, bending to her task, she began to sing:

Oh, love 's my meat, oh, love 's my drink,
Oh, love 's my daily fare;
Asleep, awake, forgit or think,
I breathes it in the air!
Oh, love,
I hear
You hummin' 'mongs' de bees!
Oh, love,
I hear
You singin' in de trees!

By the time she had repeated the chorus through a first suds and was ready to change tubs, the recent guest had turned out of sight, and Rose Ann glanced with a smile from the point of

her departure to Napoleon, who smiled back at her from the third angle of his repose, as he remarked, as if simply to fill felicitously the wash-board's pause:

"I see sperits is thick roun' heah dis mornin', honey."

"Yas," replied Rose Ann; "I taken notice how Towser been snappin' at de air, an' all three teethers seein' sperits in dey sleep. Huccome you taken notice to de sperits, 'Poly?"

"I felt one bresh by me jes now, lak a mighty win',—purty nigh friz my ear-rim,—but it nuver shuk a leaf on de tree."

"You don't say!" She looked up into the tree indicated. "It ain't chilled you none, I hope? 'Ca'se dat 's a sperit-win', sho. Any mortal win' 'd be boun' to mek de trees trimble. I 'm glad to see dey good sperits, dough. None o' de chillen ain't whimpered—jes smiled

an' laughed in dey dreams. An' Towser, too, he jes s'luted 'em frien'ly in de sunlight. He knows dey good sperits. Ricollec' how he barked an' tuk on time de patteroles got atter you?"

"Yas, I 'member. But dey warn't no patteroles, honey. You heah me. Dey warn't nothin' but sperits. Dat 's my b'lief. You ricollec', we nuver seen nothin'—jes heerd a voice out 'n de darkness. Dat 's huccome Towser seen 'em so clair. He don't pay no 'tention to folks in de flesh less'n dey rattle de gate-latch."

"Maybe you right, 'Poly. But yit 'n' still I can't git it out 'n my min' dat dat voice sounded mighty familius. I don't want to say whose voice it sounded lak, but it sho did strak my yeah wid a mighty familius soun'. It cert'n'y did. Seem lak it had *long-time-ago* in it, too, an' I can't forgit it."

Napoleon was more than languidly interested, for he even raised his body as he asked:

"Tell yo' ole man whose voice it favored, honey. Huccome you nuver is spoke about dis befo'? Was it de voice o' de livin' or de dead?"

His wife wiped her hands on her apron and rested them upon her hips while she turned to her husband, but before speaking she swept the road with her eyes as if, in spite of her assurance, she felt a vague fear. Then she said slowly:

"Hit 'minded me bofe o' de livin' *an'* de dead. Lak a dead voice in a livin' mouf—"

Then turning suddenly and laughing as if she might have said more than she intended, she exclaimed:

"Listen at me prophesyin' an' talkin' 'bout sperits, lak as ef I was 'feard!"

Then, resuming her work, she began slowly and in a wavering minor key to sing:

Oh, heaben 's mighty close,—
Yas, close, yas, close,—
Ef you got a yeah to listen
To de hos', to de hos',
Ef you got a yeah to listen to de sto-ry!

Oh, heaben 's mighty nigh,—
Yas, nigh, yas, nigh,—
Ef you got a' eye for visions
In de sky, in de sky,
Ef you got a' eye for visions o' de glo-ry!

As she sang she had gradually warmed to the words, repeating the last couplet several times, and when she finally stopped, she turned to the dog, who was again whining, while he lifted his nose into the shaft of sunlight above his body.

"I tell yer, pardner," she began, still keeping her eyes upon the dog, although addressing her husband, "I tell yer, my b'lief is dat Gord meks it up to a dorg."

"What yer say, sugar? Mek up what?"

"Why, I say I b'lieve Gord meks it up to a beas'—for *bein'* a beas'. Us humans we stan' up an' sing about 'seein' visions in de sky,' an' Towser, heah, he don't say nothin', but he *sees* 'em. An' de puny chillen, too, dey see mo' 'n dey 'll ever see when dey git uppish an' strong. Yas, bless de Lord! I b'lieve he meks up a heap o' things to de dumb an' little. Even us blackskins we see mo' 'n white folks sees. Why, plenty o' folks passes by heah an' looks at you an' looks at me an' de chillen an' *pities me.* Even dat yaller triflin' Calline Caxton, did n't she call on her white blood to pity me an' cas' slurs at you? She sho did, an' she so triflin' de win' won't have her, an' not a chile to lay 'er out when she dies, an' she married to ole slim-shanks, bow-laig Clay.

Good Lord! lemme git along wid dis rènchin'! Deze starched clo'es is boun' to dry wid de even-glories to-day, sho."

The quick strokes by which she had so cleverly "hit off" her neighbors amused Napoleon tremendously, for he fairly roared with laughter. And thus restored to better spirits, he waited only for the measure of her wash-board to start up lustily:

Love made St. Peter walk de sea,
It built ole Noay's ark,
It lit de stars for you an' me
To squench de blindin' dark.

His wife did not join with him at first, but when he had reached the chorus, she came in jubilantly:

Oh, love,
I hear
You hummin' 'mongs' de bees!
Oh, love,
I hear
You singin' in de trees!

III

OF course, as Rose Ann was a wholesome woman and no fool, one might have known that the formal consent which she had so cheerfully given to what some of her critics were pleased to call her "jug-handle love"—all on one side—must have had a definite excuse. Not that it would do to admit the conditions of her life's romance as testimony in a case involving the question of any woman's sanity—or any man's, for that matter; still, it is gratifying when love falls into line with reason and common sense.

Although Napoleon was a man of leisure,—that is to say, of declared, even

professional leisure,—he is seen to have been a person of health and physical perfection, and so he took his ease as a live man takes it, in conscious enjoyment, and with such variations as pleased his fancy. As Rose Ann expressed it, "When his mammy marked him for rest, she marked him for pleasure in it."

There were hazy "fish-bitin'" days, for instance, when the plush chair sat vacant indoors, and milord betook himself to the bayou behind the Cherokee hedge. At other times, discerning by nature's intimations when the hickories were full of squirrels or the marshes of snipe, the fields alive with partridges, or the bayou itself swarming with ducks, in pursuit of pleasure he perforce became provider and suffered no resultant illness, his mind being that of the sportsman alone, untaxed with thought of provision.

On these occasions he generally took several of the children with him, and of course the dogs, often allowing the former to draw straws as to which might go and which must remain at home to cook dinner; for no matter how alluring the sport, Napoleon was never beguiled into ignoring what he called his "in'ard dinner-bell," which rang more regularly than many of the bayou clocks. Nor would he, under any circumstances, carry a dinner-pail.

"Stale picnic victuals" he declared to be "good enough for them that liked 'em"; and if his spouse occasionally exhibited a shade of disappointment,—for it is a relief to have one's best beloved get out and be gone once in a while,—he would add, "No, honey; no woods dinners an' divo'ces for me!" Whereupon the good woman would beam with affection revived, and would even per-

haps remind him to "be shore to sen' home any luck in time to be cooked, ef he craved it for supper." And, indeed, she could promise this without incurring serious interruption, for there was scarce a featherling out of the nest—otherwise the cradle—who could not, with the slightest instruction from over the maternal shoulder, get up a dinner the aroma of which had more than once, when the wind was tantalizing, hurried the field-hands home at noon, even though, perforce, they were obliged to go in an opposite direction and to pots far less savory. The outdoor fire which boiled her clothes would turn out from its live coals both bread and potatoes done to a turn behind her back, even when the oldest one at home chanced to be the little Rosanne while she was only "gwine on ten." And the greens-pot with its endless resources,

even to its supreme product of dumplings, was ably managed without so much as a peep under its lid by the mother.

Even "last-minute luck," generally a simple matter of "br'ilin' or fryin'," was easily accomplished by "the undergrowth," the four-year-old twins often running races at skinning squirrels or picking ducks. Indeed, Rose Ann often remarked playfully, "Sence my ole man is marked for *rest*, I sho is markin' my chillen for *work*." And she would sometimes add: "All 'cep'n' de baby. I 'm 'feard he 's his daddy's chile; an' ef he is, I pray de Lord to fire his soul to preach."

It had once been her hope to turn Napoleon's life into account in this way, seeing that the cloth is popularly symbolic of ease, but he promptly put her to shame and to fear by answering that

"ef he ever entered de Lord's vineyard as a *laborer*, he 'd look for his days to be short."

Even in his workless life, however, there were slight ways besides the incidental help of rod and gun in which he oiled the domestic wheels, even though he never supplied the power which drove them. For one thing, he generally delivered the finished wash for his wife, this being not labor *per se*, he explained, but "on'y *'stributin'* of labor." When the basket was so heavy as to be burdensome, Rose Ann would send one of the children with him to "tote it." Napoleon liked these trips. He liked, in the first place, "the feel of money in his hand," and he liked the excuse to walk down the village street and to pass the stores. There was an undefined something which forbade his joining the laboring-men who met in

one or two of the commoner shops on Saturday afternoons. It was in part, perhaps, a sensitiveness to their estimate of him; this, with the fear of sportive references to his mode of life from the older men. And, too, he was in a manner ashamed of his good dressing. It was a slight thing for a man to remark that "Brother Napoleon seemed to keep dressed for chu'ch all de week," but it teased him.

Napoleon never spent any of the money which he collected in trust for his wife. In the beginning he had tried it, but it had not worked, although defended by the fetching argument that he and she were "all one." Rose Ann was firm about a few things, and she had claimed and held the laborer's right to disburse his earnings. Still, seeing the humility with which he accepted her decree, she was always eager to spend

as much as she might for his personal indulgence. For instance, when he once remarked as he handed her the money, "I see a kag o' fine pickled pig-foots fresh opened at Lawton's, honey, an' dey sho did mek my mouf water," although she replied dryly, as she tied the coins tightly in her handkerchief, "I be boun' for you seein' some'h'n' t' eat," in a few minutes she called one of the boys aside, and taking a dime from her pocket, she whispered:

"Daddy crave a pig-foot, baby. Run along up to Lawton's an' git him a couple." Then hesitating, she took out another nickel: "Better git three, baby. I 'll eat one wid 'im for company."

By this time the word "pig-foot" had been caught by one of the small fry, who set up such a yowl that Rose Ann was obliged to hurry the messenger

away to stop the cry; but before he had reached the turn of the road, it seemed best for the family peace to call him back, and when he started off again his mouth was so full of small coins that he was afraid to run, and his mother shouted after him:

"Look out, an' don't swaller yo' foot 'fo' you git it!"

And as she took up the baby for a little coddling, she mumbled to it lovingly: "Nemmin'; when buddy comes, mammy gwine give her baby a nice, cool foot fresh out 'n de pickle. Hit 's mighty tasty to cut feverin' toofs on, yas it is."

And so, in a few minutes, did she, leaving the "teether" happily rolling in the clover with his tidbit, while she went to drop the remaining eleven into the greens-pot.

"'Nemmin'; . . . mammy gwine give her baby a nice, cool foot.'"

IV

Oh, love 's my meat, oh, love 's my drink—

SO she sang as she stirred the coals. If the course of true love did not always run smooth with the generous liver and dispenser of life Rose Ann, it certainly ran with many a joyous ripple and song in these sunny days. If there were occasionally rocks in its river-bed, making passage difficult, they also served to froth the waters and to send them along to a merrier tune when once they were passed. And there were rocks in its course—rocks so formidable that at times they almost threatened to wreck the entire little

fleet commanded by the brave admiral Rose Ann.

Once in a great while there were cold days on Palmetto Bayou, and sometimes there were not even second-hand shoes for the little feet which were yet pink in the soles and unhardened to the frosty ground.

And there were occasional crises when bacon and meal and molasses money had to go for quinine—when the mornings were foggy and the reed-grass and calamus wet along the bayou's brim. Napoleon knew certain indigenous remedies for the common enemy of residents along low waterways, and when the pressure of need was not upon him, he would sometimes gather great "bo'quets" of pennyroyal and mullen and peppergrass and spearmint and boneset and camomile, in their seasons, and Rose Ann would brew love's

offerings into proved specifics, which she would sometimes supplement with protective charms, such, for instance, as the tiny cotton bag which the baby wore on a string about his neck when he was written down as naked. These simply medicated mascots were in no wise related to the familiar "hoodoos" or "cunjers" of which much has been written. If, in addition to the asafetida gum, the few cloves, and the bit of garlic which composed most of them, the mother added a leaf of rosemary for luck, or any tiny trinket of mystic suggestion, it was only the expression of individual superstition.

As for Rose, she always put into her teethers' charms a baby tooth naturally shed, and if she could find one on a five-year-old's pallet, dropped in his sleep, so much the better. This represented nature's operation at its best,

and was reserved for future use. It was like the shedding of a rose-leaf or the falling of an apple.

It seems strange that fire-wood should ever have been scarce in a cabin set on the edge of an oak and pine forest, but, as Rose Ann more than once lamented, "trees stan' ready for de sacerfice, but dey don't bow down an' walk into yo' fireplace. Dey has to be chopped into service."

Now, while Napoleon occasionally felled a great tree worthy of his muscle, for simple love of conquest, or perhaps for the sharpening of his appetite, which, however, never seemed in jeopardy, he could not consistently cut the same into lengths for use. He would have done it, no doubt,—indeed, he said as much,—but for consideration for his busy spouse, who had "enough to do widout havin' a sick man on her hands."

It was well that Rose Ann was a manager, as otherwise there might have been real suffering in the canopy cabin. Without any consciousness of her own scope, however, she displayed a faculty in the manipulation of her affairs that would have been remarkable were it less common in her class. There were many colored households along the bayou and beyond which were not even dignified by a father of the chair, and which were wholly provided for, as was Rose Ann's, by a dusky "madonna of the tubs." Of course much of their provender was, as hers, "second-hand," a fact which assured better quality than they could have bought.

Even Napoleon's clothes had to be taken up or let out before they lent themselves fully to his expression.

The clothes question in the South seems never a serious one to the negro

laundress, who is counted as natural heir to discarded garments. And, of course, there are ways of managing, under pressure, to borrow from the wash certain hidden accessories, as stockings, for instance, which go to the support of one's self-respect.

But Rose Ann prided herself upon doing nothing of this sort. Napoleon's clothes, when he wore them, were always his own, and if the little folk went to church in nature's own stockings, the same might be said of them: they were wearing their own.

Taking it all in all, the family of Rose Ann and Napoleon was as happy as the best of their kind. The father had never been heard to speak an unkind word to chick or child, so boasted his fond mate; and, certainly, if filial devotion goes to show anything, he must have been an exceptional parent. His

bed of pine-boughs upon the ground was always kept fresh by the little ones who slept with him through many a sweltering summer afternoon when he wearied of the warmth and limitations of his plush rocker. Here it was, by a ludicrous chance, that he lay surrounded by the other six of seven sleepers when he was roused by the census-taker, to whom he gave his memorable answer to the question as to his occupation:

"I 's a family man, sir."

And so it stands in the book today.

If Rose Ann had not been blinded by her own devotion, she must sometimes have been a little jealous of the children's adoration of their daddy, which under pressure was even exclusive. For instance, a single fish was always "daddy's fish," the first and last blossom on the vine were his.

But Rose Ann was superior to small things. Indeed, her own love was such that, when there was no one else at hand in whom to confide, she would sometimes talk to her ten-year-old daughter of her happiness.

"Wait on yo' daddy good, baby," she would say, "'ca'se ef Gord was to tek him away, you would n't nuver git another lak him. Yo' ole mammy 'd haf to tek up wid some po' ole laborin'-man to be stepdaddy to you-all." At which the little girl would protest that she "would n't have no other daddy," and Rose Ann would aver that there would be nothing else for her to do but to marry again, "wid all dese growin' chillen to suppo't," for she "could n't stan' her groun' at de wash-bench, day in an' day out, wid *no* glorification of love to consolate her heart." This evidence of her realization that, under any

"'I 's a family man, sir.'"

possible conditions, she would pretty surely have to continue breadwinner, was not without its pathos, albeit one must smile at her frank measure of herself.

V

BUT Rose Ann was by no means lacking in friends in whom to confide her life's "satisfactions." Her habit of "countin' noses an' den drappin' in a big extry po'tion for de pot" was a hospitable one well known to her neighbors, and it was one that was particularly grateful to a certain octogenarian black woman, Granny Shoshone, who was ever a welcome guest, for she had known Napoleon's mother both "befo' he was thought about an' endurin' his markin' days," and was in consequence more tolerant of his way of life than were some of his neighbors.

Granny had only two teeth to her

head, and as they were prominent in her lower jaw, they had a way of clenching her utterances by seeming to hold them fast against the tip of her nose until she was done with them. Indeed, all her emphatic statements became thus more or less oracular in effect in the weird and fearless expression of these twin witnesses, which, through lack of opposition, had long been given over to expression alone.

"Yas, indeedy," she would exclaim, in extenuation of Napoleon's disability, "you can't go behin' de beginnin'!"

Granny was in the shop one particular day when pigs' feet were bought, and although she was on her way to visit "a sufferin' sister" in another direction, she suddenly decided to put it off and to go instead to see whether the splinter had worked itself out of Rose Ann's toddler's foot or not.

As granny arrived after the dinner was "po'tioned out," there was no gathering together for the meal. Napoleon was served in a heaping tin pan upon his lap in the chair near which his wife expected to join him with her own pan when she should have filled the children's plates, which they always bestowed upon the grass where they chose. But the arrival of her guest, who was not long in fixing herself on the ground beside the pot, of course located the hostess. Granny wanted perfect freedom of speech with its lubricant, and when Napoleon was present, she was one popular subject short.

"Yas, indeedy," she repeated as soon as she had done declining and then taking everything offered—"yas, indeedy, talkin' 'bout 'Poleon, I was studyin' las' night 'bout 'is mammy, ole Jane, an' de way she marked her baby. I ric-

ollec' she was mighty sorry he warn't a gal, too, when he come, 'ca'se she say she sho did crave to subs'tute one rockin'-cheer 'oman in her place befo' she died. But when de chile come a boy, she 'lowed she did n't keer. She say ef he growed up as purty as he come, he could hoodoo some 'oman to work for him."

Rose Ann started at this.

"I ain't workin' for 'Poleon for no hoodoo," she retorted; "I works for him 'ca'se I loves him."

To which granny answered with a high, cracked laugh: "Love ain't no mo' 'n a hoodoo, nohow."

Teeth against nose, so she clenched her epigram.

And at this playful generalization Rose Ann was pleased to laugh with her. "I sho b'lieves you 's right in dat," she even granted. "Love is a hoodoo, sho.

Ef it warn't, I could n't nuver see what some folks sees in de ones dey marry. Dar 's ole bow-laig, stammerin' Sam Shaw, stutters so he calls his own wife 'Sis' Sal,' an' she a sinner. I sho can't see what Sal seen in him."

"Love 's a riddle, an' it 's a lucky 'oman dat can answer her own," mumbled the oracle, letting the drollery pass without emphasis over a bit of corn-dumpling.

"Is you mean to tell me dat Sal loves dat lean guinea nigger, granny?"

"Be still tel yo' elders git done, gal. *I say what I say!* An' I say dat 's jes what Sal puzzles over *'bout you*—how you ben' yo' back over de tubs for 'Poleon—"

"Dey may wonder!" interrupted Rose Ann. "But dat don't hender 'em f'om tryin' to git him away f'om me. Every time Sal got a minute to spare she 's

filabusterin' up an' down de road befo' 'Poleon's chair, an' me standin' right heah—brazen devil dat she is. But he don't pay no 'tention. I know he cuts a fine figure in dat pattern-rocker in de mids' o' de flowers de chillen done planted roun' it. But even he don't bother 'isse'f. Ef he wanted to start out 'oman-killer, he would n't practise on deze Palmetter Bayou gals, I tell you dat."

She had talked so excitedly that several of granny's witticisms were lost. But she probably caught some of them, for when her flurry had spent itself, she added, evidently in reply:

"Dat pattern-rocker? Dat 's a *prize* rocker. I got it for 'im on soap-papers. Dis heah 'Rench-me-quick Soap' is got cow-pons to it, an' fifty of 'em 'll draw a sewin'-machine an' sixty 'll git a pattern-rocker, any color plush you choose.

I picked red 'ca'se red hit goes good wid black."

"It sho do become 'im," said the old woman, glancing toward the chair, in which by this time the man was nodding.

"Yas, it sho do," added his wife, "an' dem evenin'-glories, dey sets 'im off, too. Dey so white an' him so black. Ole Mis' she gimme de seeds, an' de chillen, dey planted an' waters 'em. Dey sho does love dey daddy."

"Well," snapped the oracle, "half de time life ain't nothin' but a see-saw, nohow—Love on one een' an' Labor on de yether."

Rose Ann was not quite clever enough to grasp this, and yet she felt that, in some intangible way, it was not quite to her taste, so she put it aside by a mild denial:

"I got a plenty to do widout see-sawin'."

"Hush, gal!" laughed granny. "Hush, I say. You keeps sech a' even balumps you don' know you on it. But you lucky so long as Love don't jump off. I sho would be proud to see you swap een's for a while, dough. So you got dat cheer wid cow-pons f'om de soap-papers, is you?"

"Yas, an' 'Poleon sho was proud an' happy when he see me pass de sewin'-machine notch an' save up to de rocker. He sho was. I 'lowed it would pleasure my sight mo' to see him swingin' in red plush 'n what it would to stitch up de few duck breeches he 'd set in endurin' de summer."

"So it do, chile, so it do." There was real sympathy in the old hag's voice, even when presently she added: "You know his mammy she hoed an' planted an' picked cotton right heah on dis spot whar 'Poleon sets an' teks de breeze,

an' I often wonders ef she kin look down, or up,—Jane did n't die in grace, po' soul,—I often wonders ef she kin see 'im tekin' de rest she pervided for 'im."

"Me, too," said the wife. "I sho hopes de Lord lets her have de cornsolation o' seein' him. An' I trus' she kin see my happiness, too—mine an' de chillen's. Jes look at 'em! One ridin' 'is foot, an' two on tiptoe puttin' dem glories in his haid. I don't 'low 'em to climb up on de plush."

"You kin be sho o' one thing," said granny. "Ef Jane is free to go whar she choose, she hovers whar she kin see 'im. She was a devilish 'oman, some ways."

"Yas, she was devilish. I 'll say it, ef she is de chillen's heabenly gran'-mammy. I 'bleege to locate 'er in heaben, 'ca'se I don't b'lieve Gord would work her de way she was worked an'

burn her, too. But she sho was devilish when she 'd git mad. She marked her chile for rest, an' den she 'd beat 'im when he would n't work. Yas, ma'am. She had de po' chile purty nigh rendered in two. She was too high-temp'rate for me."

"She was wuss 'n high-temp'rate, Jane was. She was col'-blooded devilish, dat what. I ricollec' once 't she got tired hoein' an' follerin' de plow, an' she worked a spell on her marster, so 's he 'd see her all swiveled up an' puny, an' eve'y time de overseer 'd put her in de fiel', she 'd mek some excuse to pass befo' her marster, an' he 'd give orders to have dat sick nigger tooken out 'n de fiel', an' he 'd sen' good liquor down to her cabin an' special rations. Well, she kep' dat up th'ough two craps. Den, bless goodness, her ole marster failed, an' de overseer he bought 'im out, an'

I tell you he got even wid ole Sis' Shirker. She was a stavin' worker when she 'd work anyhow, an' she done a big part todes makin' ole Yankee Sabbath-breakin' Eben Dowds rich, she sho did. It was whilst she was stavin' for him dat she took thought to mark her chile for dat plush rocker. She sho done it. Ef anybody doubts de trufe, let 'im jes look at de way he fits it. I tell you his mammy she measured him for it, in wrath, wid a hoe in 'er han'."

Napoleon seemed to be sound asleep now, and the wife looked at him fondly as she said:

"I often taken notice to de way dat plush don't faze him. He sho do become it."

"Sech as dat," mumbled granny, "hit 's got to be born in de grain. I know ef I was to set in plush, I 'd hol' my weight up in spite o' myse'f, so

'feard I 'd crumple it. I 'd be as bad as yaller M'ria Mumford when she bought dat velveteen skirt out 'er lottery money. She say she nuver 'spe'unced no pleasure in it, 'ca'se she got tired stan'-in' up; an' I axed her why she nuver set down, an' she 'lowed she could n't. She say sometimes, when she 'd be so tired she 'd pretty nigh fall in her tracks, she 'd try to set down, but her knees would n't give way."

"Folks like dat ain't got no business wid finery."

"No; dat 's what I 'm sayin'. Ef I 'lowed a frock was finer 'n I was, I would n't put it on. Ricollec' when I was a young dancin' gal I had a linsey-woolsey frock once-t,—a fine plaid wid a yaller thread crisscross over it,—an' Ole Mis' she gi'e me some o' dis heah lace quillin' for de neck an' sleeves, an' when it was basted in an' laid out on my

bed of a Sunday it looked so fine I started to fol' it up an' put it away, an' den I stopped an' looked it square in de eye, an' commenced to put it on; but de lace it ketched my eye ag'in, an' I see it was boun' to override me, an' you know what I done? I snatched it off an' crumpled it up, an' pitched it on de flo' an' tromped on it, tel I had it whupped. Den I put it on my back an' started out, an' it nuver browbeat me no mo'."

"Umh! you don't say!"

"Yas; but I got a lace collar dat I 'm skeered to wear yit, an' I had it fo'teen years. Ole Mis' gi'en it to me. I could wear de collar all right, ef it did n't have de faint smell o' Ole Mis's wardrobe. I ain't got de face to wear it—not wid her threatenin' to come in de flesh an' ketch me; howsomever she in her grave seven years past, one sniff of dat collar brings her right befo' me tel

I kin all but tech her han'. Sometimes when she begins to fade away, I 'll smell it hard an' try to fetch her back ag'in, but she won't come. I has to put it away ag'in 'fo' it 'll git back de power o' de resurrection. No, some days when I gits lonesome I teks it out an' shets my eyes, an' I heah de rustle o' de black silk dress, an' I know she 's comin', an' I seems to feel 'er by me; but I ain't nuver had de face to so much as lay it roun' my black neck—not now."

"Pass it along to me," laughed the jocund Rose Ann again. "Dat 'll jes suit my true-love's taste down to the groun'."

"Suit nothin'! No, honey. I gwine meet Ole Mis' in heaben wid dat collar. It 's been layin' wid my grave-clo'es tel it 's yaller, but time de draf' blows along de golden streets f'om de openin' o' de gate when I slips in, an' Ole Mis'

ketches a breaf o' her ole wardrobe 'fumeries, I looks for her to come for-'ard to meet me, bless de Lord, so I does!"

Teeth against nose-tip notwithstanding, there was pathos rather than caricature in the old face granny raised to the sky as she spoke.

Almost any emotional negro—and Rose Ann was emotional—would have caught somewhat of the fervor of her guest, but her life's connections were too strongly physical, too material, and too vital for enjoyment of any projection beyond the realm of sense. Her spiritual part was strong enough, but in her lusty mid-life how could it find other than sensuous expression? Such as she, perhaps, granny had been thirty years before. In thirty years more, when time's ravages might establish new facial relations, she might come to

enjoy such contemplation, but now, while the telling characteristic of her figure was the frank approach of bust to chin, she withdrew from the outlook.

"I 'clare, you gimme de col' shivers, granny." She shuddered. Then suddenly recovering herself, she chuckled: "Love is too sweet to me down heah below yit." While she spoke a bee darted between her face and granny's, and as she dodged it she laughed: "Look out! Don't git stung wid Mr. Yaller-belly, dusty wid de corn-tassels an' pumpkin-flowers. Git stung by him now, an' you 'll go a-hongerin' for love, sho."

She had risen from her place on the ground, and as she doubled over her tub now, still half laughing, she began to sing, mischievously, but somewhat under her breath, as her lord still slept:

Oh, love an' me goes hand in hand,
When I got a hand to spare!
A loveless life 's a sinkin' sand,
A drowndin' soul's despair.

Although she had begun low, her notes had gradually swelled until the last words, "A drowndin' soul's despair," came out full and fine. And as she struck up lightly into the chorus,

Oh, love,
I see
You buzzin' 'mongs', etc.,

there suddenly rose from the chair a fine, strong tenor. This was a signal of freedom to the children. "Daddy was awake."

VI

WHEN the two had finished the chorus and started in for a new stanza,—granny laughing at the duet, —little Rosanne lifted her single skirt and, joining in the singing, struck out in cake-walk fashion. Boy Wash, the twelve-year-old, seeing her, hurried from behind his father's chair, and swung himself into the arena,—the open bounded by cabin, wash-bench, and chair,—the child Rosanne following; and when they had reached the center, they began posing and dancing, passing and repassing each other, perfectly unconscious, reckless in mirth, innocent as life unthinking.

It was the great mid-hour of a mid-

summer afternoon. The throbbing air, teeming with life-secrets, was aglow with brilliant-winged things, sun-mad and pollen-drunk. Even the flowering tree seemed delirious with all its motley bloods afire.

Granny said afterward that it was "de smell o' chiny-blossoms" that came to her in the wake of the bee that "waked up her ole foots," and perhaps it was. What could be more reminiscent of youth and love in Louisiana than the odor of china-blossoms on a bayou-bank?

If the children had seemed to dance finely before granny set out, and there were three dancing when she began, they were soon bestirring themselves to keep up with her.

As she strode nimbly forward, skirts lifted, body braced for action, she gave her head a single little lift. It was

slight, but it was peremptory and aimed straight at the chair where sat and sang the man Napoleon.

Now, if Napoleon was anything in his own estimation, he was "a puffec' genterman," to whom a lady's invitation was as a queen's behest. As he rose to meet the old dancer who, notwithstanding many coquettish withdrawals, was confidently approaching him, he might have been king of the Cannibal Islands, or anything you please in black royalty. He even lowered his tone somewhat in deference to his partner as he gave her his hand. It was not long before the three children on the outskirts began to show great delight in the combination, the twins beginning simply to jump up and down, and the nude baby on the shawl keeping time with his body as he sat. Little granny, as lithe and slight as a witch

of the woods, eager, alert, ever in the initiative, almost but never quite anticipating a measure; great long-limbed, loose-jointed Napoleon, leisurely striding, ever threatening to come in late, but always sailing in on time; occasional humorous pedal syncopations when for a critical moment failure seemed imminent, but was deftly averted in change of time. Oh, it was great dancing, even though the dancers knew only that they were having fun.

At first, engaged with granny's caprice, Rose Ann simply dropped upon the wash-bench, roaring with laughter; but she was soon singing again, as loud as the loudest, beating time with her open palms upon her fat knees. But this was progressive, and the buzzing wings swung so low, and the air trembled so with its message of life and love, she could not hold out long.

No one knew just when she started out. Her movement was so stealthy, so noiseless and feline, that when she had given her heavy body a single upward toss as if to cast out its weight, it seemed to settle a few inches from the ground, where it began to spin, and presently it had taken direction in a ring on the rim of the dancing-space—only one motion, but that in perfect rhythm with the song.

Round and round she spun, round and round, until it seemed that she must fall from sheer dizziness. Then, suddenly, with the quick signal which the dancer knows, she beckoned to granny to take her place, and with a whirl, all in tune, right hand high in air, she advanced to her husband. He was quick to match her pose, but before taking her hand he saluted her with a low bow, which she humorously answered with a

dipping curtsy, skirt drawn back with left hand, the right still high, inviting his. But at a touch of his fingers she coquettishly spurned the hand, deftly diving under one arm and then the other and back again, virtually turning the dance into a chase in which her pursuer finally confronted her, when she prettily surrendered by offering him both hands thrown to the left. This was an invitation. He seized them, locked arms with her, and together they "moseyed down the center." Then switching away, they "split partners," each taking one child and another in turn. It made no difference which way she led—for Rose Ann was easily leader from the first step: the rest felt and followed her every impulse as if drilled in her whimsical art.

For a few moments after granny set sail on the border, it seemed as if she

"With a whirl, . . . she advanced to her husband."

had lost all sense of time. Even her thin, wind-filled skirt added to the suggestion of a spinning top, and she was as rapt as a dervish. It was only when the singing began to diminish in time that there came into her body a fine swaying movement, a tipping easily from side to side, farther and farther, until with the lengthening diminuendo she dipped almost to the falling-point, as a loaded doll, which threatens, but never topples.

This "slowing up" of the dance was the great moment, and when it became plain that the old woman's eyes were closed, there was a second of suspense as to how or where she would stop. Only a second, though, for just when falling seemed imminent, she whirled off at a tangent, precisely as a top when it is spent, and fell safely into the plush chair. For a moment she sat here with

arms still extended, eyes closed, spellbound. When finally she let her arms fall and opened her eyes, she exclaimed:

"Gord! but it was sweet! I done lived it all over—'way back to my chillenhood!"

But this was only a brief emotion. In a few minutes she had risen and, with scarce a stagger, stepped over to the well, filled a gourd from the drawn bucket there, and begun to drink. Drop by drop she took the cool water, lifting her little head for each swallow, as a chicken drinks.

When she had finished, the dipper was in requisition by the rest of the dancers, all of whom were dripping wet, and as she handed it to Napoleon, she laughed:

"Well, ole man, it sho is a pity you could n't git some o' yo' steam-power

'tached to a workin'-machine; you 'd git rich."

She started off, but stopped suddenly, looking up into the trees. "Look-a heah, baby!" She had hurried to Rose Ann. "Dey 's sperits roun' heah to-day, chile. Look at dat leaf shekin' in a still tree, an' not a bird nigh it. Dey 's sperits heah, sho. Dat sprig o' leaves shek jes lak a warnin' han'."

"I 'spec' dat 's yo' gyardi'n sperit spyin' on you a-dancin'!" laughed Rose Ann. "An' hit 's gwine 'po't you to headquarters, an' have you turned out o' de chu'ch."

The words were lightly spoken, but granny answered warmly: "Dey kin 'po't on me much as dey like. I danced on de sweet grass,—to chillen's singin', an' not to no devilish string-fiddle,—an' it taken me 'way back to de innocence o' my chillenhood, an' dey warn't no sin

on de groun'. But look, chillen, for Gord's sake! Look at dat pair o' breeches on de line filled wid win', an' dey ain't a breath blowin'. Lemme git out o' dis neighborhood! I sho b'lieve dey 's a *ha'nt* arter *somebody*."

Napoleon and Rose Ann laughed with the children at the ludicrous appearance of the trousers dancing on the line; but they exchanged glances, and when granny had gone, the man said:

"I don't like dat sign, honey. Hit 's a man's shape. No sperit did n't come an' fill up dem breeches for nothin'."

He was pretty serious, but Rose Ann laughed.

"Well," she said as she went back to her tub, "hit 's a man-message, jes as you say, ef it 's anything, an' so I 'll leave you to meet it, man to man. Dis tub 's a-callin' me." And she began to scrub away.

"Maybe hit 's de sperit o' de dance," Napoleon mumbled. "Maybe we turned him loose befo' he got done, an' he jes jumped into de breeches to ease down."

VII

IT seems probable that in the humdrum routine of life, in the wear and tear of strenuous struggle, and the disillusionizing effect of day-in-and-day-out familiarity with its object, Rose Ann might have lost a realizing sense of her happy romance but for the challenge of public opinion which required that her life should be a perpetual defense.

Her song of the tub was perhaps as often one of bravado, inspired by the sight of a passer-by, as of inward rejoicing. But, of course, she could not know this. She realized only the occasional hints of the women and the jests

of the men over "King Napoleon an' his throne," and if these were straws, they at least showed the way of the wind. Yes, and there had been that midnight call of the "patterole,"—if patrol it was,—when there was a knock at the door, and a voice out of the darkness warned the master of the house that unless he were seen to contribute to his family's support "it would call again."

That was all, but it had sent the man of leisure out hunting and fishing pretty regularly for an entire season. But after a while it had been forgotten, or if not forgotten, it was remembered only as a bad dream. And now two years had passed.

Husband and wife had not spoken of the incident for more than a year until Rose Ann referred to it. It was not one of her favorite topics. Neither was it his. Both would have been quite willing

to forget it utterly, and they thought they had virtually done so until suggestive things began happening to some of their neighbors.

That is to say, several delinquents—white men all, so far—had been called out at night, and not only warned, but punished. For instance, there was "old man Sloven Sousley" (who was not an old man at all, but who had grandchildren and a bald head at thirty-eight), who had been taken by a body of maskers and carried to the edge of the mill-pond, made to disrobe, and thrown into the water. When he swam out, the crowd scrubbed him in turn with long-handled brooms dipped in soft soap, "shaved" him with a pair of shears, and then made him wash his own clothes and put them on wet—all by the light of the moon. This done, they "invited" him to swallow a cup of

whisky and quinine, drinking his health in imaginary glasses as it went down. Then, courteously assuring him that they would be happy to repeat the performance as soon as he needed another bath, they moved back and let him go home, each man of the line doffing his hat to him politely as he passed.

Then there was the case of Tom Timbrel and Joe Squires. Both these men were known to abuse their wives, and their punishment was simply to cowhide each other in turn, the whipper calling his victim by the name of his own wife as he laid on blows, the "regulators" looking on and applauding.

It is true these instances were different from Napoleon's, and yet—well, it made him uncomfortable to know that regulators were abroad in the night. Even while he tried to convince himself

that his previous visitant had been a spirit, he knew better.

Spirits had warned him then of coming evil. Spirits do not bring warning of other spirits. And now they were manifesting themselves again. Coincident with the work of the regulators were "signs and wonders" almost daily discerned. There is an old plantation saying, "Seek coon-tracks, find coon-tracks." Rose Ann repeated this to her husband one night when he kept insisting that it was a "warnin' sperit" which blew the wind down the chimney.

"Seek coon-tracks, fin' coon-tracks; seek sperits, fin' sperits," she laughed. But while she spoke she stirred the fire and opened the door behind her to "draw 'em off ag'in—casen dey should be sperits."

This anxiety, vaguely felt for some days, took sudden shape when granny

spoke. The "man-sperit" dancing on the line fairly seemed to mock him, not only during the brief moment of its manifestation, but in the night when Napoleon tried to sleep and could not. Even granny, unsuspicious, with nothing to fear, had plainly discerned it; and as no one had been told of the midnight visitor, of course she could not suspect its import.

It is only the swing of a pendulum from one extreme to the other. No doubt the reckless enjoyment of the dance intensified the foreboding which followed it, on its very heel.

It is well when the time is short between dread and its realization, if evil must come.

So, when Napoleon was wakened, by a loud rapping, from the sound sleep which followed a sleepless night in that darkest and longest hour just before

day, although he shook as with an ague, he felt a sense of relief. Despite the fact that Rose Ann had laughed at his fears, he saw, when he had lighted a candle, that she had slept in her dress. He saw only this, for something in the crack of the door as soon as it was opened put the candle out, and before the man knew what was happening, a paper was thrust into his hand, and there was a sound of retreating footsteps.

The door was closed with a bang and locked with trembling fingers, and although both husband and wife were curious to see what had been given them, they feared to make a light, and sat before a waning fire, not daring to start a blaze until the sun rose.

Napoleon could read a little, or, rather, he could spell, and as the document which had been "served upon

him" was done in printed letters, he made out most of its words and realized their legal form, although he did not grasp their full import. Evidently the composition was the work of a wag, for it read about like this:

Notice

To Mr. Napoleon Jackson, Esq., D.G.L. (Doggone Loafer):

You are hereby summoned by the Midnight Ministers of Mercy to appear before that body in the county court-house at the midnight hour of high moon on the august night of the 8th of August, 18—, to answer to the charge of vagrancy in the first degree, unwarranted luxury in the second degree, and general moral debility in all the degrees known to common law.

(Signed) M. M. of M.
(Midnight Ministers of Mercy),
per Cat's-paw.

VIII

FOR the entire morning Napoleon puzzled over this document, and he was just decided to take it over to the minister of Zion's Chapel and have him decipher it when that dignitary chanced to drop in for a pastoral visit. Even he found some spelling to do before he could venture an interpretation, and he declared that he was "jest a little rusty on his Latin," and would have to take the paper home and "consult wid his fureign dictionary," which he must have done, for he returned in an hour to say that, so far as he could make out, Napoleon was a prisoner of law under a triple charge, and that he was open to

three degrees of legal punishment, "less'n he could clair hisse'f." These were, he was informed, "imprisonment, hangin', or electrocutionin', an' maybe all three."

The truth was, the Rev. Solomon Byers had unwittingly taken the paper to its writer, who had given him as sensational an interpretation as his wits could find on the instant.

It was, on the face of it, a grave matter. Napoleon and Rose Ann had realized that from the first, and the woman was considerably disturbed by the time fixed, which was the night of the day to follow. A thing of this sort needs not only preparation, but time to know how to prepare. However, her spiritual adviser, seeing that she was troubled, was prompt to turn legal adviser as well.

"In any case o' de law," he told her kindly, "de prisoner is intitled to defend

hisse'f, so, my sister, ef I was you, I would git witnesses an' tek my whole family into de co't. I s'picion dat de intire trouble is on de 'count o' dat prize rockin'-cheer. You know jealousy is evil-eyed an' green, so de Book say, an' dat red plush hit ketches it. Jealousy travels dis road eve'y day, an' ef you got speritual vision you can see him walkin' arm in arm wid all yo' frien's, whisperin' an' p'intin'. So outside witnesses dey won't do him much good. Ef you got air ole frien' wha' knowed his mammy, an' 'll testerfy for him, fetch him along, but you an' de chillen you 's boun' to be his chief witnesses, an' of co'se I 'll stan' by 'im close-t as I kin, but I can't speak much wid dat rocker for my tex', less'n I preach ag'in' it. So better lemme he'p you on de Q. T."

Rose Ann listened with keen attention to all he had to say, but while it

was helpful, it did not satisfy. When it came to standing before a court, she wanted some one to represent her—her and "him." She wanted a white man, a lawyer. There was only one in town whom she felt committed to her in friendship, and that was a young attorney, Martin Caruthers, son of her former owners. Her mother had been the Caruthers' cook in the old days, and she and Martin had played together as children. Above everything she wanted him to be there and to "speak for her," and yet—

She had hardly owned to herself whose voice she had recognized in the midnight warning of two years before. She had not confessed it. Mart was his father's son in manner, voice, person, all, and when Rose Ann had said to her husband that the warning from the dark was "lak a dead voice in a livin' mouf,"

she meant it. But she never told even Napoleon what her fear was. It was too sore.

When she suggested his name now to Solomon, he hesitated. When Caruthers had "expounded" the paper to him, he had not seemed particularly friendly to the accused. However, if Rose Ann could enlist him, so much the better. So he advised her to try it.

The woman was never slow to action, and in an hour after her conference with Solomon she was dressed in her best French calico with plaid *tignon* and white apron,—for she was a negro of the old school,—and was trying to find Martin Caruthers. When she called at his residence, he had "just gone down the street," and on the street she found that he had "but that moment stepped over to the house." In his office it was the same sort of story; and as the day

was passing, and she had much to do, she was obliged to give up the search.

Besides the outside details there was extra tub-duty at home, and in a double sense, to prepare her family for reputable public appearance. Every self-respecting darky mother, who is not so poor as to be beyond all rule of dress proprieties, sees to it that each chick and child of hers shall have in reserve a white frock—against the vicissitudes of life or death. Even though there might not be shoes to go around, there was never a time when Rose Ann could not, with a little time, turn her entire flock out in white, and certainly in this crucial experience she would not fail. The "trial" was to be in the night, it was true, but she had heard of midnight sessions when the court was full, and the township had only recently put electric lights into the court. It would

not only be like day, but a dazzling day.

It was nearly sunrise when, having stood the last of the little fluted garments alone upon the floor, she threw herself across her bed as she was, too tired to take off her frock, and slept there until daybreak. And be it said to his credit, Napoleon did not close his eyes until she had done her work. Wide awake he lay, even talking of other things, and doing his best to divert her troubled mind. He really wished to get up and turn the fluting-machine for her; indeed, he even suggested it: but she answered that "now was no time to git his blood pizened wid labor," and as he knew he should need all his strength for the conflict, he lay still.

But on the night following it was he whose pleasure it was carefully to braid the tight plaits which decorated the

"*Acts of love, and not of labor.*"

pate of the maid, Rosanne. He it was who bathed the little ones, who "buttoned up the backs," and tied careful "ribbin bows" here and there for the whole six; he who drilled them in "mannerly behavior" in court. Indeed, he had always performed most of these personal services, which were, so he generously distinguished them, "acts of love, and not of labor."

Rose Ann had put the children to bed early in the evening, and when she waked them, she had made ready a hearty "breakfast," giving all, even to the baby, sips of coffee to insure their keeping awake.

IX

IT was an impressive procession which passed into the court-room. Napoleon, carrying the baby upon one arm and leading another by the hand, led the way, followed by the rest in order of size, two by two. All were dressed in white, excepting Rose Ann and old Granny Shoshone, who brought up the rear in French calicoes, neckerchiefs, and aprons. Napoleon had protested mildly against the white duck for himself, but Rose Ann would have no other. White was the color of innocence, she argued, and so white it was.

Although the trial was supposed to be held in "secret session," we have

seen that Rose Ann was prepared for an audience, and perhaps she was even a little disappointed to find a dimly lighted court and empty seats. This she perceived from the vestibule door, which commanded a view through the long hall into the court-room beyond. It frightened her as the expected audience would not have done. She felt unsupported, deserted. To stand before a court of inquiry backed by a crowd of her townsfolk to whom her presence would be an appeal was one thing; to be entirely at the mercy of a merciless court was another.

But she had not long to wait in fear. When Napoleon stepped into the hall, an usher with blackened face strode forward, and swinging wide the court door and beckoning to him to follow, led the way. As the accused set his foot within the court-room there was a sudden blaze

of light, and entering from the opposite side there appeared a line of bearded men wearing wigs and black gowns, and stepping to the measure of the "Dead March," which seemed to come from nowhere in particular, but which instantly fixed the pace for all alike.

It was an impressive sight—the procession of whites, black-gowned, on one side, the black-faced, white-robed, on the other; the funeral music; the solemn tread.

When Rose Ann had approached the court-house, her one thought was that she would sweep the crowd with her eye until she should find Mart Caruthers, and she would communicate with him even if she should have to stand up and call to him before everybody. But she was so dazed now that when the court was seated before her on the platform,

"It was an impressive procession."

the judge in his chair, she had forgotten all about Mart and everything else.

The music stopped when all were seated, but in a moment it began again, a lively air this time, and from the back of the room.

Rose Ann would not have forgotten her manners,—church and court manners are much the same,—she would not have forgotten them enough to turn and look over her shoulder, but for a certain swishing sound which her keen ear detected beneath the music of the strings. It was as the rustle of silken skirts, which no doubt it was, for while the band played, masked spectators, draped in sheets, were slipping stealthily, specter-like and grim, up into the gallery seats, curious members of the families of the regulators, probably, out to see the fun.

Rose Ann was quick-witted, and she

nudged granny at her side, and the two glanced from the maskers in the gallery to the judge and jury on the bench, and they both knew suddenly that the whole thing was a masquerade. Up to this they had artlessly accepted the court, on its appearance, as venerable men and strangers.

Now she studied them suspiciously, one by one, measuring each with her eye for Mart Caruthers. Then suddenly she began to tremble and to turn cold. Mart was not there, but in the judge's seat sat his old father, Judge Martin Caruthers, ten years dead.

Poor Rose Ann had been under a great strain for two days. She had been living very much upon "evidence of things not seen," getting her intimations in "signs and wonders."

Suddenly recognizing her old master, she forgot the idea of the masquerade,

and the specters in the gallery were genuine spooks; the swishing of their garments without sound of footsteps was unearthly.

No doubt it was only a coincidence that just at this moment the light was lowered, or, rather, the great Brush light in the ceiling was put out. It was bad for the eyes and even worse for disguises. Then the music ceased, and the judge rose.

Before he began to speak Rose Ann was beginning to wonder who the other risen dead might be. No doubt they were contemporaries of her old master, probably members of his former court. But at the sound of his voice she knew only that he was risen from the grave to bring her husband to judgment.

She thought fast as she listened, and wondered how she had been so dull as

not to have suspected the mysterious verbiage of the summons, the appointment for "midnight, high moon." Her thoughts flew so swiftly that she had trouble to keep up with what was going on before her eyes. The first thing to bring her to herself was the baby, who suddenly screamed and clung to his father's neck.

Then she realized that the judge had told Napoleon to put the child down, and things began to assume natural relations. She knew that a point had been scored for the prisoner. She quietly rose and offered to take the crying child, but it only made matters worse, and in the end the baby had to be carried out. When it was gone, the next little fellow climbed upon his father's lap, and the performance was virtually repeated.

When order was finally restored, the

judge rose, and addressing the prisoner, said:

"Have you any counsel, sir?"

The man did not answer. No doubt the question was unexpected. While he hesitated, Rose Ann held up her hand and asked if she might speak.

Given permission, she rose, and in a voice broken with feeling, she said: "Ole Marster, ef you please, sir, we done choosed Marse Mart to stan' for us, ef he 's present in de co't, ef you please, sir." And she sat down.

This was terrible, and for an instant Martin was so shaken that he could not find voice. He immediately saw, however, that, unless the whole proceeding should be a fiasco, he must change the order of procedure, and quickly. He was a thoughtful fellow, though, and not without imagination, and it was hard for him. Knowing and under-

standing the woman's mistake, he felt almost as if he were indeed speaking for his father, and he wished himself well out of it. But he could not "back out" now. How could he, and his sweetheart in the gallery?

Instead of allowing the case to develop in the ordinary process, he must force the issue. To do this in a mock court, the only law of which was license and its limit that of the court's wit, was not a difficult thing when once realized.

Waiving the woman's inquiry, he stepped to the front, and began his arraignment, which was about as follows:

"The prisoner who stands before us to-night is no stranger to this court. On the contrary, he is a familiar figure. Perhaps if I were to ask for a popular vote as to the best-dressed, most comfortable, and most conspicuously independent citizen of color among our peo-

ple, the answer would be unanimously: 'Napoleon - of - the - plush - rocker.' [Laughter.]

"If I were to ask the name of the most industrious and hard-worked woman, the answer would be, 'Rose Ann, wife of him-of-the-plush-rocker.' [Applause.]

"If I were asked to name the most appealing household among our colored population, a household of helpless children, ofttimes reduced to the pitiful necessity of begging their bread, I could not but name the children of this man, Napoleon-of-the-plush-rocker. [Distant laughter, as if from the gallery.]

"Now, it is one thing to be a peaceable citizen and another to be a useless one. No man can be a good citizen and a bad father, and so I do declare the prisoner, Napoleon, in the highest sense, a bad father—a father whose example

is pernicious, and inasmuch as he does not support the woman of his choice, I do hereby denounce him as a bad husband. So here we have that dangerous combination, a bad husband, a bad father, a bad citizen."

The words rang out with force, and when he paused there was a wail from the children all along the line, and Rose Ann was heard to exclaim under her breath, "Speak up for yo' daddy, chillen."

"Ain't no bad daddy!"

"Good daddy!"

"Loves my daddy!"

"Nice daddy!"

So the wail ran until stopped by a peremptory "Silence!" from the judge.

"Now, in the name of common decency and justice and sympathy and right-mindedness, I charge this man with what, in the law, we are bidden to call

'vagrancy,' and if he has any defense, the court would be glad to hear it."

When the judge sat down, Rose Ann rose slowly.

"Ef you please, sir,"—she spoke in a tone of awed respect,—"ef you please, sir, I begs to speak."

"You have the court's permission," said the judge.

"Seein' dat we ain't got nobody to speak for us," she began, "I stan's up in de presence o' de co't an' befo' Gord, an' I takes on myse'f to defen' Napoleon ag'in' de charges de co't done brung ag'in' 'im. I say dat ef he 's a bad husban', his wife ought to know it; an' I say de way he do suits me, an' ef I 'm suited, I don't see who 's got a right to complain. I married for love, an' I got it. He married for love an' labor, an' he 's got it, an' we bofe satisfied. Ain't dat so, 'Poleon?"

The prisoner bent his head. While Rose Ann hesitated, granny thought she had done, and she rose nimbly.

"I stan' witness for Br'er Jackson," she chirped in the high voice of age.

"Let his counsel finish first," said the judge.

"No; age befo' beauty," said Rose Ann, nervously, and she sat down amid the cheers of the court. And granny held the floor.

"How long have you known the accused?" asked Mart, smiling.

"I been knowed him sence his mammy was a baby," snapped granny, teeth against nose-tip.

"Well," laughed Mart, "we can't get back of that. We will admit your testimony. Now, will you please tell the court what you know of the accused —in as few words as possible, if you please." In this, as in all other testi-

mony, there were men writing as if taking it down.

"Yas, sir. Fust an' fo'most, I know 'Poleon don't work beca'se he can't he'p hisse'f. He can't work. His mammy —why, you-all chillen, you 'member his mammy, ole 'Hoodoo Jane.' Ef you don't, you oughter. But Jane warn't no hoodoo. She was a hard worker, an' when she labored so hard for her las' marster, Eben Dowds, Jedge Mo'house's Yankee overseer, wha' bought him out, she was so overdriv' dat she swo' dat de chile dat was gwine come to her th'ough all dat endurin' labor should n't nuver lay a hand to a plow. *She marked him for rest.*

"I ricollec' same as ef 't was yisterday, she say she was gwine leave one rockin'-cheer nigger to tek her place when she died, an' she done it. An' I 'm her witness to-day, befo' Gord."

This outspoken testimony was not without effect, as the stillness of the court testified.

"Is that all?"

"No, sir, dat ain't all. I could stan' heah an' talk all night an' not tell all I know 'bout 'Poleon. 'Poleon's daddy, he nuver worked. He was ole man Dzugloo. Y'-all ricollec' ole man Dzugloo wha' b'longed to de Sandefurs, wha' dared de overseer to tech him, an' tore up de cowhide in his face lak a rag, an' den went up to de house an' called his marster out an' tol' him he would n't labor hisse'f, but he 'd git mo' work out o' any gang he 'd put him over 'n anybody else could. An' his marster he let him try it, an' he kep' orn addin' to his gang tel he overseed de whole plantation. He was de on'ies' nigger overseer dey ever had on dis bayou. You-all chillen, you, Marse Mart Caruthers, an'

Marse John Henry, an' Marse Tom Dilworth" (she recklessly named the young men whom she had recognized through their disguises), "you-all knows all about ole man Dzugloo. He was a' Af'ican prince, so he say; an' I know time he died, his wife she buried him in his feathers. Well, Napoleon heah he 's ole Dzugloo's chile on his daddy's side, an' Hoodoo Jane's on his mammy's side, an' he ain't got no workin'-blood in him. Jane could work, but she was a nachel shirker. I 'm a' ole 'oman, an' I know what 's what, an' I know blood 's blood. I ain't got a drop o' set-down-an'-tek-it-easy blood in me. I boun' to keep a-goin'. I kin dance, an' I kin shout, too, when I 'm happy, but I can't set down lak a' idle-born lady. An' Rose Ann she 's de same way. But 'Poleon, why, jes look at him. He ain't been in dis co't a half-hour, sca'cely, an' see how

he got hisse'f spread over dat arm-cheer."

This brought down the house, of course,—and, by the way, the gallery audience had noiselessly increased after the beginning of proceedings,—but yet the appeal of mother and children overworked and neglected was greater than any sensational speech.

But granny had not yet finished her defense. While the court applauded her last sally she was recruiting her wits, and in the pause which followed she began again:

"Befo' I sets down I wants to say dat eve'y chile in dis co't is a witness for Napoleon. 'T ain't no use for you to fetch in de baby; he done declared hisse'f. But dey 's a whole litter o' chillen heah,—eve'y one de spittin' image of his daddy,—an' ef you wants to git testimonious answers for de

prisoner, jes ax 'em any little inside questions 'bout who does de pacifyin' an' cherishin' o' de babies, an' see what dey say. Ax 'em who washes dey little faces eve'y mornin' an' wrops dey hair an' teaches 'em 'ligion an' manners. Dey ain' one o' dem babies but knows dey 'Now I lay me,' an' dey learned it at dey daddy's knees.

"Who learns you 'ligion an' manners, chillen?" she asked, turning to the line.

"Daddy!" cried the chorus.

"That will do now, granny," said the judge, rising, "and unless the accused has something to say for himself—"

At this Rose Ann stood up.

"I ain't finished, ef you please, sir," she said slowly. But her tone was not that of the awed woman who had had the floor a few minutes before. The old woman, granny, had never shared her delusion in regard to the court. For a

moment only, when Rose Ann first spoke, she was puzzled, but she was not deceived. Before Rose Ann had spoken a dozen words granny had recognized Mart Caruthers, and while the case had proceeded, she had detected the others whose names she had fearlessly called. And this it was which had jolted Rose Ann suddenly into a knowledge of the truth. The frequent titterings in the gallery had already made her suspicious, and now when she rose a second time, she knew well to whom she spoke.

"Jedge," she began, "I 'm mighty sorry you had it in yo' heart to call my little chillen beggars. We been born an' riz up right heah wid you-all, an' when I sent my little chillen into town to ax some o' de ladies wha' been knowin' us all dey lives to please see ef dey could n't fin' some ole 'sorted-sized shoes to fit 'em, I was n't axin' 'em to put dey

han's in dey pockets. I was jes bequestin' 'em to please look in de trash-barrel, dat 's all. To give away what you done a'ready th'owed away, well, of co'se hit 's charitable, but it ain't inconveniencin'.

"I sho is hurt to de co'e to have Marse Mart Caruthers, whiskered up tel he favored his pa so he scared me, stan' up in open c'ot an' call me or mine beggars. My Gord! Beggars!

"My gran'daddy worked for his ole gran'pa, Squire Saunders, f'om de time he was ten yeahs ole, pickin' cotton, tel he died, nigh on to a hund'ed, settin' at de lodge-gate, wid de smoke-house keys hangin' to his belt. When de levee broke, many 's de time, yeah arter yeah, he worked all night. Den, on top o' dat, my mammy an' my daddy dey labored for Marse Mart's folks, in season an' out o' season. My mammy she

nussed Marse Mart hisse'f, when Missus had de miz'ry in her breas'—nussed him each time befo' she taken her own chile, 'ca'se he was white an' her marster's son, an' her own baby, he had to wait, same as a calf has to wait an' tek de odd chance. Yas, an' I often heerd my mammy say dat Marse Mart was sho one invig'rous chile an' a greedy nusser."

This was frightful, but Mart was too much of a man to stop her. The good breeding which kept silence in the gallery was worse than any laughter could have been. There are times when silence cuts like a knife.

"Yas, sir," Rose went on, "dat was my brother Esau, de thin little one, de runt. He allus was a puny chile, an' my mammy she fed 'im th'ough 'is teethin' wid cow's milk to accommodate Marse Mart yonder, stan'in' befo' we-all to-night in jedgment, lookin' so noble.

Esau 's Marse Mart's coachman now, an' he 's eatin' his leavin's yit. But nobody could n't scald 'im away, an' I don' blame 'im. A gentleman's leavin's is better 'n a po' man's findin's.

"An' den, to come along down, my daddy, eve'ybody knows how he was kilt follerin' Ole Marster into battle.

"An' now, jedge,—Marse Mart,—I ain't got no desire to ac' 'bovish an' to step out o' my colored place an' show no disrespec's, but it sho do look to me lak dey ought to be enough betwix' me an' my folks an' you an' yo' folks to lemme walk in yo' ma's back gate *wid my head up* an' say to yo' ma, 'Mis' Em, honey, ef you got a few pairs o' ole shoes or stockin's yo' chillen done wo'e out, 'stid o' flingin' 'em away, please, ma'am, pass 'em on to my little crowd.' Yas, I claim dat I ought to be able to do dat an' not called no beggar."

She hesitated, gathering strength.

"So I say, jedge, ef I does walk in de back gate an' hol' out my han', I claims dat I got some'h'n' to draw on. Ef my gran'daddy nuver drawed out nothin' but his victuals an' clo'es, even for de time he worked all night on de river-bank an' waited over-age at de gate; ef my mammy give her breas', an' ef my daddy faced de gunshot, an' all dey drawed out was dey livin': I claims dat dey 's a little kindness in de Caruthers' bank for me an' my chillen to-day.

"I ain't axin' for money, 'ca'se my black people ain't paid money. Dey paid in life an' service, an' all I wants to draw is 'membrance. Dat 's all. An' I gits it. I gits it f'om ole Mis' Em, yo' ma.

"Ole shoes, gethered up, an' wo'e-out clo'es, helt up to de light an' measured wid her eye 'g'ins' de size o' my chillen, dat 's 'membrance.

"All dat white piqué you see in de co't to-night on dis little row o' stair-step niggers, hit 's been wo'e out in yo' ma's back yard befo' it was passed on to my tar-chillen.

"An' Ole Mis' she nuver cuts off no buttons, nuther.

"No, Marse Mart. I pray de time won't nuver come when my chillen 'll haf to walk into strange back yards wid dey han's out. But no matter how I enters Ole Mis's gate, *I hol's my head up.*"

If Rose Ann had been the center of attraction a moment before, it was Mart now who was in the eyes of the audience. He was having the worst of it, surely, and it was interesting to see how he would come out.

Before rising—or, rather, as he did so—he turned and quickly removed the long white beard which had been his disguise. His face was as red as a

beet, but it was very serious when he spoke:

"Aunt Rosie,"—his voice was as tender as if he were speaking to a little child,—"there has been a mistake made, and I 'm sorry. I beg your pardon. So far as we are concerned, you are never a beggar at our door—you or your children. In my resentment of your husband's course I was thinking especially of you, but I failed to realize your feelings. It was stupid of me, and I 'm mighty sorry.

"But I do here and now, in the presence of this court and of those here assembled, arraign your husband on the charge of idleness, which in our law has no pleasanter name than vagrancy. So far as he is concerned, his family might be beggars. Let us put it that way. In arresting him and bringing him to justice, my colleagues

and I were thinking only of his wife and little children. If he were starving alone, through his laziness, we should not be apt to worry much over it, although we might feel obliged to insist upon his earning his grub in the workhouse, even then. But enough. You are working too hard, though, Aunt Rosie, and it is not right."

There was a strange expression on her dark face when the woman rose to answer this, and her voice exhibited some timidity, overcome with an effort.

"I have knowed some mighty fine gen'lemen, Marse Mart," she began, "gen'lemen wha' lived on dey wives' fortunes, an' driv' fine horses an' spo'ted roun' wid biggity manners, an' nobody 'rested 'em or called 'em 'vagrams'—*but, of co'se, dey was white.*"

There was a laugh at this, which was not a barbed thrust, as it was aimed at

no one present, though all recalled notable instances of the kind in the community.

"No, sir," the wife continued; "my ole man he s'po'ts his family jes as much as most o' de cooks' husbands does along dis bayou, ef I ain't mistooken. I ain't tellin' no tales when I say de moes' mos' of 'em does is to tote home de heavy baskets or buckets dey wives packs for 'em in de kitchens whar dey works. 'Poleon ain't nuver walked in no white back gate 'cep'n' to tek home clo'es, an' he goes in an' comes out wid manners an' behavior. An' dat money he fetches it home to me. He nuver stops to match nickels wid it on de roadside, lak some of his criticizers does, an' he nuver swallers a nickel in no saloon, nuther.

"De on'ies' diff'ence I see as to workin' is dat most o' de men loafs in

workin'-clo'es, an' 'Poleon, he ain't disguised in no laborer's dirt. He got a wife dat keeps him clean an' sets him up in a cheer dat fits his comfort, an' it 's her pleasure to do it. He got a passel o' chillen dat scrambles to see who can wait on him fust, an' it 's dey pleasure to do it. An' for him, 'twix' de risin' an' de settin' suns, dey 's a heap o' lovable services he performs one way an' another for me an' de chillen.

"Yas, sir, life is pleasu'ble to we-all 'ca'se we jes nachelly lives in love an' trus'. I been married gwine on fo'teen yeahs, an' 'Poleon ain't nuver lied to me, an' I ain't nuver is lied to him. We don't come f'om dat sort o' stock, thank Gord. My folks is been *gate-keepers* an' *key-toters* f'om *'way back*, an' *I ain't afeard to look nobody in de face.*"

"It seems to me, Aunt Rosie," Mart interrupted, "that perhaps Napoleon

would like to say a word in his own defense."

Turning then to the man, "Suppose you come up, Napoleon, and give your good wife a little rest. You keep her working for you; don't let her do all the talking for you, too."

As Napoleon rose slowly, he added, "Speak up, now."

The black man bowed courteously, in some embarrassment, which added rather than detracted from his appearance, as, fanning with his hat, he said slowly:

"I—reelly, Marse Mart, I 'm 'feard I ain't got nothin' to say. 'In de days gone by, I often 'cused myse'f when I 'd be tekin' it easy whilst Rose Ann stood on gyard, but arter listenin' to her an' granny, what dey done witnessed for me to-night, I think maybe—I ain't sho, but maybe I does de best I kin. Ef I

"'I 'm 'feard I ain't got nothin' to say.'

don't, I gwine try f'om dis time for'rd. But ef I fails, won't you gemmen, befo' you gits my little chillen out at night ag'in, please look a little close-ter, an' mek sho you treed de right possum—mek sho dat whilst you tryin' to tackle miz'ry you ain't jes pesterin' happiness?

"I done walked de flo' wid dis little one asleep on de bench by me purty nigh all night, two nights las' week, an' he 's ap' to ketch col' in de night air."

"You walked him, did you? I am surprised that you did n't work yourself sick with so much exercise." [Laughter.]

"Dat ain't work, Marse Mart. Dat 's my pleasure."

Perhaps it was the sound of his father's voice so near him that waked the child, who sat up straight and, blinking at the light, began to fret. He was a handsome little fellow.

"Well," said Mart, "I think we won't detain you any longer. The boy wants to get to bed. A fine little chap he is, too. What do you call him?"

"Rose Ann she named him. He named for yo' pa, Martin Caruthers, but we jes calls him 'Jedgie' for short."

It was a good time to cut short the "proceedings," and Martin, addressing the gallery,—at least, that was the way it seemed,—said quietly, "The case is dismissed."

Napoleon took the sleeping child in his arms. Rose Ann had recovered the baby, which had been sleeping in her lap for some time. Coddling it now while she shifted her position, she rose, and standing back while the others passed out, followed, as she had come in, with granny.

They had reached the door, and the "court and audience" were laughing

and talking within, when granny suddenly turned back, and rapping upon the door to attract attention, said, curtsying as she spoke:

"Ax yo' pardon, jedge, but who won de case, please, sir?"

For answer there was a chorus:

"Rose Ann!"

"Napoleon!"

"You did!"

"The piccaninnies!"

"Dat 's jes my 'pinion!" she exclaimed—an opinion she held fast against her nose, even shaking it in the face of the court for a moment as a cat does a rat, as, with a mischievous curtsy, she ducked out the door.

She left the court-room in an uproar of mirth when she joined her party outside. Rose Ann and Napoleon, although relieved of a weighty anxiety, had not much to say as they walked

along. The children were fretful, and in a little while the eldest two had taken up the complaining toddlers, so that granny alone was unburdened, and she brought up the rear with playful jest and satire worthy of a more appreciative audience.

They had reached the edge of the field when the baby fretted, and Rose Ann, to soothe him, began softly to sing:

Oh, heaben 's mighty nigh,—
Yas, nigh, yas, nigh,—
Ef you got a' eye for visions
In de sky, in de sky,
Ef you got a' eye for visions o' de glo-ry!

Singing made walking easy, fixing the pace, and one by one the voices fell in, until, when the road turned into the narrow wood, the swelling notes filled the air, even taking on a sort of tender accompaniment as they rose and mingled with the sighing of the pines.

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